

**SUMMARY OF THE
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
MARCH 23, 1999**

The On-site Assessment Committee of the National Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Conference (NELAC) met by teleconference on Tuesday, March 23, 1999, at 12:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (EST). The meeting was led by its chair, Mr. Steven Baker of the Arizona Department of Health. A list of action items is given in Attachment A. A list of participants is given in Attachment B. *The purpose of the meeting was to discuss assessment checklists and comments received from the Virginia NELAC Workgroup.*

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Baker called the meeting to order with a brief discussion of the agenda. He noted that Mr. James Webber, of the New York State Department of Health, was joining the committee as an invited guest to discuss development of technical training courses and assessment checklists for asbestos analysis. The committee then scheduled its next three meetings to be held by teleconference. They have been scheduled for April 7, 1999, April 20, 1999, and May 5, 1999.

Mr. Baker informed the committee that, based on previous discussions of Mr. Stan Morton's attendance at meetings, he had written Mr. Morton a letter informing him that his attendance at committee meetings is required.

ASSESSOR CHECKLISTS

The committee addressed six completed assessor checklists that had been e-mailed to participants prior to the meeting:

- 1) General Quality Systems
- 2) Colorimetry
- 3) Extractable Organic Compounds - Gas Chromatography (GC)
- 4) Inorganic Compounds - Ion Chromatography (IC)
- 5) Metals - Inductively Coupled Plasma (ICP) Analysis
- 6) Volatile Organic Compounds-Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectroscopy (GC/MS)

These checklists generated minimal discussion and received consensus committee approval for posting on the NELAC Website. The committee then turned its attention to assessor checklists that still need to be completed. Seven outstanding checklists were identified:

- 1) **Microbiology** - The microbiology checklist is being prepared by Mr. Wayne Davis and Mr. Charles Dyer. In discussion of this checklist, Mr. Davis sought committee input. He noted that an EPA Office of Water Implementation Plan for Performance-Based Measurement Systems (PBMS), dated August 7, 1998, states that microbiological parameters are method-defined. However, the Methods and Data Comparability Board,

an interagency task force, takes a different position on PBMS. Mr. Davis indicated that he will include in the checklist a disclaimer about method-defined parameters.

- 2) **Metals - Atomic Absorption (AA)** - Ms. Athene Steinke volunteered to prepare this checklist.
- 3) **Metals - Graphite Furnace/Atomic Absorption (GF/AA)** - Ms. Steinke also volunteered to prepare this checklist.
- 4) **Titrimetry** - The titrimetry checklist is being prepared by Ms. Kelly Wilson.
- 5) **Asbestos** - Mr. Webber will prepare both the technical training course and assessor checklist(s) for asbestos analysis. After some discussion of the issue, it was decided that Mr. Webber will work on transmission electron microscopy (TEM) materials before addressing light microscopy.
- 6) **Radiochemistry (RadChem)** - The committee has not yet located an individual with the experience necessary to prepare the RadChem training course or checklist.
- 7) **Biomonitoring** - Ms. Roseanna Buhl volunteered to prepare this toxicology-oriented checklist.

Mr. Baker noted that, in preparation for the upcoming annual meeting in Saratoga Springs, the committee needs to have completed checklists posted on the NELAC Website by the April 7 meeting. The committee also needs to have training courses in near-final form by the April 20 meeting. Mr. Webber commented that, although he will make every attempt to meet the April 7 deadline for completed checklists, scheduling conflicts might delay him.

VIRGINIA NELAC WORKGROUP COMMENTS

Mr. Baker prefaced discussion of the Virginia NELAC Workgroup comments with the observation that many of the comments concern document formatting. He will respond to the workgroup with the On-site Assessment Committee's response to their comments. The committee discussed the following substantive comments in some detail:

- **Section 3.2.3 (Training)** - The Virginia Workgroup took exception with the current language of this section, and asked who the training bodies will petition for approval of their training programs. After some discussion of this issue, the committee decided to keep the current language. They noted that the section applies to day one of the training only, and sets up the allowance for an exemption of that day. The matter of who to petition is still unresolved, but will probably be the same entity that approves the training course.
- **Section 3.4.1 (Assessment Planning)** - The Virginia Workgroup suggested a change in the organization and language of this section in order to more clearly delineate preassessment activities. Again, the committee decided to keep the current language as written. Committee members expressed their belief that further defining preassessment activities constricts the accrediting authority. They also expressed their belief that the Virginia Workgroup's suggested Section 3.4.1.1 places an undue burden on the accrediting authority to provide standards and checklists. These things are publicly available on the Worldwide Web, and it is the responsibility of the laboratory to obtain them.

- **Section 3.4.2.1 (Laboratory Assessments)** - The Virginia Workgroup pointed out that if their suggested revisions were made to previous sections, Section 3.4.2.1 would no longer be necessary and suggested its deletion. The committee noted that since suggested revisions were not made to previous sections, Section 3.4.2.1 cannot be deleted.
- **Section 3.5 (Assessment Schedule/Format)** - The Virginia Workgroup suggested that this section be renamed “Assessment Procedures.” The committee agreed to propose this change at the annual meeting.
- **Section 3.5.1 (Length of Assessment)** - The Virginia Workgroup suggested moving this section to Section 3.4.1 (Assessment Planning). The committee declined to make this change, noting that the information is related to the assessment rather than the preassessment.
- **Section 3.5.2. (Opening Conference)** - The Virginia Workgroup suggested a renumbering of this section consistent with their suggested changes to Section 3.5.1. Since no changes were made, the renumbering is not necessary.
- **Section 3.5.3 (Records Review)** - The Virginia Workgroup suggested renaming this section “On-site Laboratory Records Review and Collection.” The committee agreed to propose this change at the annual meeting.
- **Section 3.6.4 (Assessment Standards)** - The Virginia Workgroup expressed the opinion that this section overlooks the Quality Systems chapter and misleadingly represents the assessor training manual as containing the standard against which a laboratory is assessed. In response, the committee noted that the last paragraph of Section 3.6.4 cites the quality systems chapter and states that additional information on the **process** of evaluating a laboratory can be found in the assessor training manual. Committee members noted that Quality Systems Section 5.4 (Organization and Management), Section 5.7 (Physical Facilities - Accommodation and Environment), and Section 5.8 (Equipment and Reference Materials) address most of the Virginia Workgroup’s concerns about laboratory assessment.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION OF THE STANDARD

In addition to those comments received from the Virginia NELAC Workgroup, the committee discussed a comment received by Mr. Davis from Mr. Michael Sodano, of the State of Maine. Mr. Sodano expressed his concern that if approved training programs are not available when the first accrediting authority receives NELAP recognition, the two-year assessor training window may not be sufficient. He proposed that the clock start when the first training course is offered, and provided a suggested language change to the standard. This suggestion generated moderate committee discussion. Although the committee decided to recommend accepting Mr. Sodano’s language change, it was noted that the NELAC Board of Directors (BOD) had hoped the original language would act as an incentive to states to be in the first round of accrediting authorities. Mr. Davis will inform Mr. Sodano that the committee will propose the change to be voted on by the conference at the annual meeting.

It was suggested that the title of Section 3.3 be changed to “Frequency and Types of On-site Assessments.” The committee agreed to recommend this change.

It was also suggested that the phrase “corrective action report” in the second sentence of Section 3.5.6 be changed to “plan of corrective action.” The committee agreed to recommend this change.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS

In light of the many issues expected to generate discussion at the annual meeting, committee members agreed to ask for additional committee meeting time. It was suggested that the On-site Assessment Committee meeting be changed from a half-day to a whole-day session on Wednesday, or that it be split between Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning. Mr. Baker will contact the BOD concerning this scheduling change.

A committee member asked whether there has been any new development of technical training courses. Mr. Baker responded that only the Organics course has been posted on the NELAC Website for comments, and that it needs to be substantially revised. He reminded committee members that the BOD does not want non-consensus items posted on the Website, and identified the technical training courses as upcoming tasks for the committee. Mr. Baker suggested that the May 5 meeting would be a time to assemble items for the annual meeting and informed committee members of the following deadlines that have been set for NELAC V:

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| Due by April 29, 1999 | - Proposed changes to the standard
- Final assessor checklists
- Final technical training courses |
| Due by May 10, 1999 | - Final committee agenda
- Replacements to fill expired membership terms |

Replacement committee members need to be selected for Mr. Morton, Ms. Marlene Patillo, and Mr. William Toth.

The committee briefly discussed a survey conducted by Mr. Jerry Parr of states that have not yet applied to be accrediting authorities. Of these, nine states indicated that they intend to apply at a later date to be accrediting authorities, thirteen indicated that they have no intention of applying, nine states are undecided, and one state did not respond.

Ms. Wilson informed the committee that she has a new e-mail address. Her new address is kwilson@cteesi.com.

CONCLUSION

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. EST.

ACTION ITEMS
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
MARCH 23, 1999

Item No.	Action	Date to be Completed
1.	Mr. Davis and Mr. Dyer will complete microbiology checklist.	April 7, 1999
2.	Ms. Steinke will prepare metals - GF/AA checklists.	April 7, 1999
3.	Ms. Wilson will complete titrimetry checklist.	April 7, 1999
4.	Mr. Webber will prepare asbestos analysis training course and checklist(s).	April 7, 1999
5.	Ms. Buhl will prepare biomonitoring/toxicology checklist.	April 7, 1999
6.	Mr. Baker will draft a letter to the Virginia NELAC Workgroup outlining committee's response to their comments.	April 7, 1999
7.	Mr. Davis will contact Mr. Sodano with committee's response to his comments.	April 7, 1999
8.	Mr. Baker will contact BOD to request additional committee meeting time at NELAC V.	Immediately

PARTICIPANTS
ON-SITE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE MEETING
MARCH 23, 1999

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